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AUTHOR DeStefano, Johanna S.; And Others
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ABSTRACT

American Business Language Education (ABLE) is the product of cooperation between universities and companies in the private sector. It is not designed primarily for use in educational institutions but for use on-site in businesses and industries, and makes use of state-of-the-art telecommunications technology to accomplish distance teaching. The on-site lanuage approach pioneered by ABLE is based on research into and experience with teaching English for Special Purposes (ESP) around the world in educational and business settings. The teletraining delivery mode has demonstrated its effectiveness in business settings. The program is based on the premise that communications must be complete to be effective, and both parties should be aware of the areas where incompleteness can occur. The program brings together the insights of anthropologists, linguists, English as a second language writers, and business people. A sample lesson is presented which was prepared for an American manufacturer with a factory in a developing nation. (JD)

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American Business Language Education Via Telecommunications

Johanna S. DeStefano, Professor of Education, Ohio State University, Senior Faculty Member, The Mershon Center, and Chair, Steering Group, The Committee for International Tele-Education (CITE); Sheila Crowell, Educational Materials Developer, Caribou Associates; Ellen Kolba, Educational Materials Developer, Caribou Associates.

ABLE, American Business Language Education, is a product of cooperation between the university sector and private sector companies, designed for use on-site in business and industry and to make use of state-of-the-art telecommunications technology for distance teaching. It is based on research into and experience with teaching English for Special Purposes (ESP) around the world in educational and business settings which indicate the necessity of providing an interactive network of cultural, linguistic, and metalinguistic behaviors which collectively are called communicative competence.

Here we define communicative competence as competence in language use or as the language abilities of the speaker and listener (Hymes, 1972). Gumperz' definition expands to:

> Communicative competence describes the speaker's ability to select from the totality of grammatical expressions available to him, forms which appropriately reflect the social norms governing behaviour in specific encounters (Gumperz, 1972).

Are you able to vary your speech and gesture to fit the expectations of others in a situation in order to transmit meaning? Are you able to comprehend what others are communicating, what others mean whether it's spoken or written? The actual language used in the communication is only part of competence. The speaker must also know how and when to use a language or languages or different varieties of a language, and with whom and, of course, when not to. We don't discuss math with our ministers or speak pig latin at a business meeting. Our knowledge of what is appropriate or inappropriate is a crucial part of communicative competence.

To further develop the concept of communicative competence, let me quote Giglioli:

> ... a person with mere linguistic competence would be a sort of cultural monster. He would know the grammatical rules of his language, but he would not know when to speak, when to be silent, which socio-linguistic options to select from a repertoire on what occasion, and so on (Giglioli, 1972).

This expanded concept of communicative competence is central to any language program, let alone in English for Special Purposes programs. It is the conceptual foundation of ABLE, with video and audio segments and print materials embodying aspects of this competence to ensure a "smaller" learning potential and subsequent realization on the part of the learner.

For all languages, communicative competence presupposes both linguistic and non-linguistic competencies. For English, communicative competence includes four major aspects categorized in two main ways: receptive competence and productive competence. Receptive competence consists of two different modes of language behavior: listening and reading, which also obviously includes interpretation of contexts and relational tasks. Productive competence consists of two other modes: speaking, including use of non-verbal signs and cues, and writing. In turn, the four types of competence can be organized two other ways, as oral competence (listening and speaking) and as written competence (reading and writing). For individuals to be fully "conversant" in a language, English in this case, they need control over both the oral and written modes of competence, with the attendant understanding of nonverbal cues and contexts.

(See attached chart for a graphic display of communicative modes with communicative competence as a conceptual framework.)

In learning a second language, each type of competence can be very different and develop at different levels of proficiency in individuals. It is not uncommon for someone to have relatively highly developed receptive competence, in other words, be able to comprehend when someone speaks to them or to read well. Traditionally, reading competence has been probably the most highly developed ability for many learning another language.

Usually where the problems in language learning arise is with productive competence, with both speaking and writing. And it is the latter over which individuals often attain the lowest levels of control. However, it is often not necessary for someone learning English as a second language to control all four types of competence with equal ease and ability. For most people, oral competence in terms of speaking and listening are crucial, especially in terms of on-going, daily communication on the job. But for many, written competence also holds great importance, in that they must learn how to write different types of business communications such as memos and reports. Obviously, reading is integral to success on the job and is highly desired by people in business with Americans.

Thus, ABLE is a program based on the concept of communicative competence in the expanded sense described above, expanded in order to include the "roots" of communication -- culture, society, thought, intention, etc. -- those factors underlying and informing a single utterance, a conversation, a poem, a textbook, a set of encyclopedias.

At this point, this competence has been described in a generalized, almost abstract manner. How does it fit with people, with their American business language needs? How can it be operationalized in a program which will be delivered in an effective manner to actually enable speakers of other languages to control English for Special Purposes both receptively and productively in the oral and written modes?

English for Special Purposes (ESP):

First, let me briefly outline the scope of the English skills needed, as they are emerging from studies of business language needs, and the describe the level of English language ability often attained by employees, especially in expanding market areas in Asia and the southern hemisphere.

The type of English required by corporations is itself multi-layered, including often more within-company communication in English than outside use.

Within a corporation, many employees have been found to be quite clear as to their need for high-level attainment of English. Typical responses are: "English is indispensable," "a prerequisite," and "in an international company, it would be impossible to make any kind of career" without it. It is relatively clear to them that English is the most widely spoken language in the world. But what kind of English? It is English for Special Purposes (ESP) which includes technical varieties of English having a different frequency of use of certain constructions such as passive very forms. ESP also includes highly abstract and generalized terms such as those based on Latin and Greek, helpful to Europeans and Central and South Americans learning English but not particularly to Japanese or Chinese learners. It also is dominated by nouns, adjectives and prepositions but not by verbs (Hullen, 1981), which evidently are too imprecise. We find a high frequency of constructions such as "The rotor bearing is graphite," "all factors important in the evaluation of....," and so on, different in degree from conversational English while built on that foundation. What is called for is a language user's ability to switch among registers, to control the forms demanded by the situation (DeStefano, 1972), within at least three typical corporate levels -- managerial, technical and sales -- each of which makes its own demands on English, being "user driven."

Within the two modalities of communicative competence -- spoken and written -- ABLE is specific to business needs as indicated within ESP research. In the oral mode, employees need, for example, a high level of listening comprehension, of ability to use the telephone, and of active speaking ability so that information and ideas can be exchanged

and understood, interaction actually taking place. In the written mode, corporate demands are such that employees may have to both read and write English fluently, but in different proportions depending on their duties. Typical writing tasks are internal correspondence such as memos and report writing. For both modes, vocabulary specialization is crucial to enable an employee to use and understand topics such as "letter of credit," "stock exchange," "international trade agreements," "bill of exchange," and so on.

All of these skills may be called for by typical corporate communications: putting over the company's point of view to affiliates and subsidiaries, demonstrating new products, advising on production methods, presenting sales and advertising campaigns, creating a product, managing a production line, etc. And common to all, in both oral and written modes, is understanding and giving explanations, an overarching ability that must be stressed at all levels of ESP instruction and training.

The levels of English for Special Purposes learned by foreign nationals working for American corporations is based usually on a foundation of general English language education provided by their schooling, sometimes as much as six years before entering a university or trade school. However, even in western European countries where English language instruction can be excellent, individuals may finish school with little or no conversational ability. And continued, university-level training may not give them the necessary language ability for technical report writing, as multinational oil companies have been finding out with their local engineers. Another illustration is the story of the South American delegate to a technical conference in Paris who, after some opening remarks in halting French, went on to say "...And now the conference will please excuse me if I deliver my talk in the universal language of engineers: bad English." If it isn't strictly true, it could be, unfortunately.

This is not to say that many, many employees of American corporations do not have an excellent command of English, both conversational and technical.. But in many countries of growing corporate penetration, the strong support provided by effective English language instruction in the schools is not yet developed or is not of sufficient quality to provide employees with the necessary control over ESP the company needs. And there may well not be much in-country support from post-secondary schools and universities, perhaps unable to provide employees with the following ESP skills to be found in many European countries:

Ability to:

1. conduct a conversation within the general framework of professional-economic situations (requesting and giving information, exchanging opinions, discussion of problems, exposition of wishes and intentions, expression of approval or criticism, exchange or polite phrases, ets.);

2. write and understand business correspondence (questions, memos, offers, orders, complaints, job applications);

3. read and understand reports, articles, advertisements and instructions concerned with general professional-economic topics;

4. understand presentations on general economic and professional themes;

5. summarize the oral statements of others with the help of notes;

6. use technical communications media (listening to the radio, using the telephone, sending a telegram, etc.).

Since the goal of ABLE for corporations is to promote the effective use of English to meet the business needs of that corporation, that means the training much be functional and clearly targeted in nature. It must also allow for as much language interaction as possible, as research shows it's actual use which enhances language learning. It also should involve native speakers of English who are skilled at teaching ESP, as in the interests of cost effectiveness and personal disruption, it is often not feasible to bring foreign nationals to headquarters for intensive language training. This, then, provides to some degree the "learning the language in the country where it is spoken" Kavanaugh (1982), speaks of as important to effective language learning especially in terms of cultural input as well.

A model of instructional approach we feel will accomplish command of ESP is a student-centered, multi-media approach to language learning in multi-instructional settings. (See model of instructional Approach.) In this model, three learning resources -- print, audio and video -- are triangulated to suggest variety, flexibility and favorable conditions by which the learner can develop communicative competence, particularly through the use of teletraining.

In our estimation, one of the most effective media for achieving ABLE goals, is teletraining. First, it is interactive, one of the most necessary components in language learning. Even if it is audio only, which we recommend for selected objectives such as increasing telephone use ability, it is interactive and can put a native speaker of English as an ESP instructor in touch with employees who might only rarely otherwise be able to interact with someone like that. A major chemical company has found audio only training useful for short duration courses mostly, and a mode which can involve numbers of employees at a given site through the use of speakerphones and microphones (1).

The second major mode of teletraining, the audiographic, can allow for language interaction particularly tailored for the written mode of ESP, again demonstrating the flexibility of the medium. For example the graphic support of the audio message can be used in teaching technical report writing and discussing and critiquing already written reports via the use of such devices as the electronic blackboard and electronic tablets. Work on memos, reviews and personnel recommendations also lends itself to this mode. The graphic devices allow for transmission of written material from the employee to the teacher and back with editorial comments and corrections, including work on spelling. Students and the instructor can, via the audio link, discuss live the comments both receiving instant feedback, and thus be able to move quickly and relatively personally toward the objectives of the various lessons. Actually, the possibilities for ESP instruction in writing via the audiographic mode are legion, especially if a high speed copier system is interfaced, along with

microcomputers at each site. Electronic bulletin boards could be created by the employees at different sites, with needed information being exchanged during the lessons themselves.

Full motion video teletraining would not have to be used a majority of the time, as it is the most expensive mode. But as it is the most realistic and fully interactive, it could be used, for example, as an introducation to a course so that the students could see the instructor, and vice versa if it is two-way video. Also, computers could be interfaced with this mode for computer-based simulation games dealing with actual corporate problems which employees at different company sites could work toward solving while learning to use ESP. Communication problems particularly lend themselves to such an interactive mode, as nonverbal cues and body language, part of the cultural component of a language, may also be transmitted via the video link.

All of these modes can be "plugged into" further tiers of language learners, so that tapes made of a teleconference could be distributed to other ESP learners for practice in listening, for example. Thus a corporation can plan to achieve a ripple effect from such instruction, filtering the information downward to employees at lower levels of English language ability, thereby moving them up in skill levels until they can be directly involved in ESP instruction.

Preliminary determinations of the cost-effectiveness of the use of teletraining are most promising when based on travel-related and lost productivity expenses, especially for employees in remote areas (Caribou Associates, 1984). A chemical company in the United States estimated an actual 80% savings by delivering the courses via teleconferencing in the audio and audiographic modes. The video mode should be quite cost-effective when major distances, meaning even higher travel costs, are involved.

Further, preliminary determination of the effectiveness of teletraining conducted by the above company show no significant differences between student learning at the host site and at remote sites. The learning at both types of sites was very high as was the students' acceptance of the mode, especially when the material (not language lessons) was presented in a discussion oriented and interactive mode. They rated particularly high exercises calling for their involvement, casework -- or problem solving -- and roleplays. The latter is an especially effective technique in language learning, and exercises are frequently used as well. Finally, the audiographic mode, which involves both the oral and written language modalities, received high ratings in terms of employee acceptance. Studies done of general language learning via teleconferencing to school students around the world also support these findings for nonlanguage education (Kavanaugh, 1982).

Selection of Language Contexts in Educational Framework:
A communicative context providing a general framework within which the functional-notional context and the problem-posing context will be integrated as the pedagogical framework, is an appropriate match to the proposed model of instructional approach.

The functional-notional context presents itself almost as a natural choice, given the pragmatic nature of ABLE. Its emphasis on teaching the use of language rather than structure, its approach to language as a tool rather than an end offers a sound instructional base. For a second language learner, social utility is a driving force to acquire more language -- the realization that language could be used to open doors to his life, has a value, and serves a purpose. The functional-notional approach correlates with a second language learner's needs and the language demands he has to meet.

The problem-solving context takes into consideration the major parallel importance of cultural competence along with language competence. It respects a second language learner's cultural biases. In a cross-cultural learning situation such as the ones business operate in, emphasis on an approach that gives cultural competence an equal weight to linguistic competence is necessary to effect communicative competence, especially if cultural as well as linguistic miscues are to be effectively dealt with.

Finally, communicative context gives purposes for language use, considers a program which is tudents-centered, incorporates all factors of language knowledge and use, and allows for flexibility in implementation. Thus, the communicative context lends itself to various components, i.e.: needs, purposes, settings, roles, communicative events, language functions, notions, discourse and rhetorical skills, varieties of language, grammatical context, and lexical content. The most attractive features of this design are its inclusiveness rather than exclusiveness or specificity, its dynamism rather than linearity in approach to language learning, and its multi-leveled, multi-faceted nature.

Background of ABLE (American Business Language Education ©)

In the November 1984 ALSED-LSP Newsletter John Swales comments on the importance of remembering the history of the discipline known as English for Special Purposes.

> My argument for cherishing the past starts with the observation that knowing the background not only gives the practitioner a sense of professional confidence but also allows him or her to identify with an accumulation of professional experience. . . .Over the the years, the factors that we need to take into account have steadily increased; and at the same time we have taken into account an equally steady increase in the number of options available to us.

Based on the sound pedagogical notion that nothing of value should be discarded--even though it may not be educationally fashionable at the moment--ABLE draws on the research and insights of both anthropology and linguistics.

The following four statements show how ABLE "stands on the shoulders of giants."

1. The Wharf-Sapir hypothesis that language shapes thought is modified in ABLE as the recognition that the underlying language is always present in some fashion and that it continues to influence the understanding and the production of the acquired language.

2. Edward Hall's work, announced to the public in his seminal book *The Silent Language*, showed the nonverbal and cultural parameters of everyday actions such as shaking hands and responding to time. The training activities in ABLE

make available to students in a formal way what is typically learned in an informal way by members of a particular culture or, in this case, since we are talking about American business style, subculture.

3. Frequency analysis is a linguistic tool that can help materials developers make decisions about what should be taught and in what order. Although many linguists go through a phase of turning their backs on the work of those who do the counting and on the lists they produce, the later theoreticians usually change their minds once they realize that the work is descriptive and not prescriptive. The ABLE System is in the process of analyzing various business language routines and encounters for frequency of occurrence of rhetorical and syntactical patterns. We also hope to provide researchers and teachers with a frequency scale for the patterns themselves.

4. Genre analysis, a term borrowed from the literary critics, came full-blown to *The ESP Journal* in 1982 with the publication of the paper "On the Use of the Passive in Two Astrophysics Journal Papers" by Tarone and others. Tarone and her coworkers--including a practicing astrophysicist--examined the technical paper with an eye to describing the characteristics of form and content that made it what it was. They set out, in other words, to describe a particular "genre." The purpose was scholarly, but the application was soon seen as eminently practical. Once the writing was understood as a form, it could then become a model for others who wanted to write in that genre. ABLE expands the notion of genre to include nonverbal, nonwritten patterns that can be described and, subsequently, reproduced by others.

To sum up what and how ABLE incorporates all of these features is not as impossible as it sounds. We started with a concept that became verbalized in

the following way:

The American Business Language Education System teaches the language routines and cultural patterns of the most frequently occurring transactions encountered in doing business with Americans. It assumes that the learners will bring to these activities the cultural patterns with which they view such concepts as affirmation, negation, conflict resolution, time, and so on. By helping learners to become aware of all aspects of a communication--verbal, nonverbal, and cultural--ABLE will foster complete communication.

What Is The ABLE System?

The ABLE System is a multimedia program in American Business Language Education that concentrates on a very specific set of communication problems:

- perceptions of time
- perceptions of when a job has been completed
- notions of quality control
- ways of identifying and resolving conflicts
- ways of beginning and ending conversations and discussions
- ways of indicating affirmation and negation
- ways of demonstrating politeness and assertiveness

The formal research indicates that these are areas in which cultural differences frequently occur. Our informal research, among international marketing consultants and American companies who manufacture in Europe, Asia,

and Central and South America, indicates that problems in these areas often affect the ability of a business or industry to get the job done.

Traditional English language programs provide much of the basic vocabulary and grammar required for initial learning of the language. Most business language programs deal with the specialized vocabulary and practices of specific industries. The ABLE System, however, while focusing on the sorts of encounters that occur in the workplace, is not limited to one business or industry. Instead, it deals with the language misunderstandings that are the objective expression of a number of cultural misunderstandings common to the business world in general.

Wherever it is necessary to make and alter plans, to negotiate, to come to an agreement, to express disagreement, to request or supply information, to give or receive directions, to report a problem, to find a solution, or to meet specifications, a common language is indispensable. Even if both parties are using English words, however, what each one understands by those words might be very different. The ABLE System looks beyond the dictionary definitions of words to the underlying cultural concepts and then tries to help students understand that their "yes"--for instance--may not mean the same thing as an American businessman's "yes." To communicate effectively, students must learn what "yes" means to the American businessman and then use the word only when that is the meaning they want to convey.

To put our theories into practice, we have designed a series of lesson formats that give the learner experience with the language routines associated with particular situations. All the language the learner encounters is in the very specific context of the workplace. For example, although the process of

recognizing and resolving conflicts is one that goes on in many settings, in these materials students become acquainted with the language used to deal with conflicts on the job.

The vehicle for learning to communicate--the ABLE System--is a complete package of print, video, and audio materials designed to identify problems and introduce new patterns of language. It includes assessment procedures; videotaped models of language and behavior; training in listening, speaking, and writing; and suggestions for a variety of ways to use the course, whether it is offered at the technical college or as on-the-job training.

Each group of training activities begins with a videotaped encounter that dramatizes the communication problem students will be focusing on. In one tape, for instance, we see an exchange between Robert Norton of USA Manufacturing (an American firm) and Samuel Lee of Offshore Industries (which is in Hong Kong). Norton asks for a change in a sample that Offshore Industries is producing for USA Manufacturing, and Lee agrees to make it. Norton, however, fails to ask whether the schedule will need to be changed as a result, and Lee does not mention the fact that Offshore will need additional time to make the change. This failure in communication results in a serious misunderstanding that could have been avoided very simply. In a replay, students see Lee agree to the change but explain that some additional time will be required:

> LEE: Yes, we'd be happy to do that, but it will take some time.
> NORTON: How long?
> LEE: An additional four days.
> NORTON: . . . Go ahead--I'll let the office know that our schedule has been changed.
> LEE: All right, Mr. Norton. We'll get right to work on it, and we'll have the sample ready, with the new mouth, on July 2.

This routine presents learners with an effective example of one way to question a statement or point out an omission without challenging the authority of the other speaker.

In subsequent training activities, students practice using strategies for listening, speaking, and writing that employ variations on this routine. They learn, for instance, to restate instructions or directions that have been given orally(on an audiotape) in order to make sure that there are no misunderstandings. They also practice making a telephone call in response to a letter that contains incomplete information:

A. Good morning, Mr. Norton. I've received your letter of July 5th, and I'm just calling to check on one thing. The fabric we're using for the doll's body is a lightweight beige knit, isn't it?

B. Good morning, Mr. Norton. I'm calling to check on one point in your letter of July 5th. We're going to use a lightweight beige knit for the doll's body, aren't we?

C. *Now try saying it in your own words.* Good morning, Mr. Norton . . .

As they work through the various training activities, students not only try out different ways of asking questions, inserting information, pointing out problems, and so on; they also become familiar with some of the idiomatic language of a business environment: "I'll get back to you," meaning "I'll call you again"; "Let's try . . . " as a polite way of making a request; "He can reach me at . . . ," meaning "My telephone number is . . ."

After practice in listening and speaking, students work with written versions of the same routines. For example, in the group of training activities that

deal with Robert Norton and Samuel Lee, students are asked to write a follow-up letter that states what they have already expressed orally in the speaking practice: that the sample will be ready on July 2 instead of June 28 because Mr. Norton's request for a change in the sample has caused a delay.

Finally, students are given an opportunity to put all their skills together--listening, speaking, writing--in a Communication Task that simulates a real-life situation. In the group of activities we have been examining, the task involves (1) listening to a caller on the telephone (via an audiotape), (2) repeating the information for the caller, and (3) writing out a telephone message for another person.

Throughout the entire round of activities, learning has been taking place in a carefully structured environment. The students are put in a situation in which it is necessary to communicate--in order to avoid an error, solve a problem, impart information, explain something, respond to a request, reach an agreement, make a suggestion, or any one of the many language tasks that will actually be required in the workplace. As they add the vocabulary and language routines of American business to their repertoire, students are also becoming familiar with the American business practices and attitudes that are inseparable from the language which expresses them.

The ABLE Delivery System

The ABLE System has been designed for both on-site training programs and for institutions of higher education, such as technical colleges and schools and teacher training colleges and schools.

1. On-site training programs will be funded and supported by business groups

or large companies.Their goal will be to train managers and workers on the job who are already doing business with American firms. Company trainers will be taught how to analyze company needs by using a series of assessment instruments that will pinpoint problem areas. Those areas of most concern to the company--and to their clients--will be taught first. Because of this problem-solving function, ABLE used on-site is primarily a management resource, although of course it can be taught to anyone who has some basic knowledge of English.

2. In institutes of higher education, ABLE's function will be twofold. Technical colleges and schools will use it as a primary teaching resource both for its business/technical content and its language content. Managers trained in the System will be able to list that training on curriculum vitae or resumes. They will most likely be chosen to as trainers themselves in any "each-one/teach-one" system their governments or trade groups set up. Teacher-training schools and colleges will use ABLE as a primary supplement to their English-language programs. Teachers trained in the system will be able to further the education of other teachers through seminars, workshops, and in-service courses. In addition to the professional sharing that may occur, teachers trained in ABLE will most likely bring their knowledge to the classroom so that every level of English user will eventually become acquainted with the content and techniques of the program.

For those companies and countries that have the facilities, ABLE has been designed with teletraining in mind. Nationwide or regional dissemination of the videotapes with appropriate print support requires some advance planning and some additional teacher/trainer discussion guides. The manual that

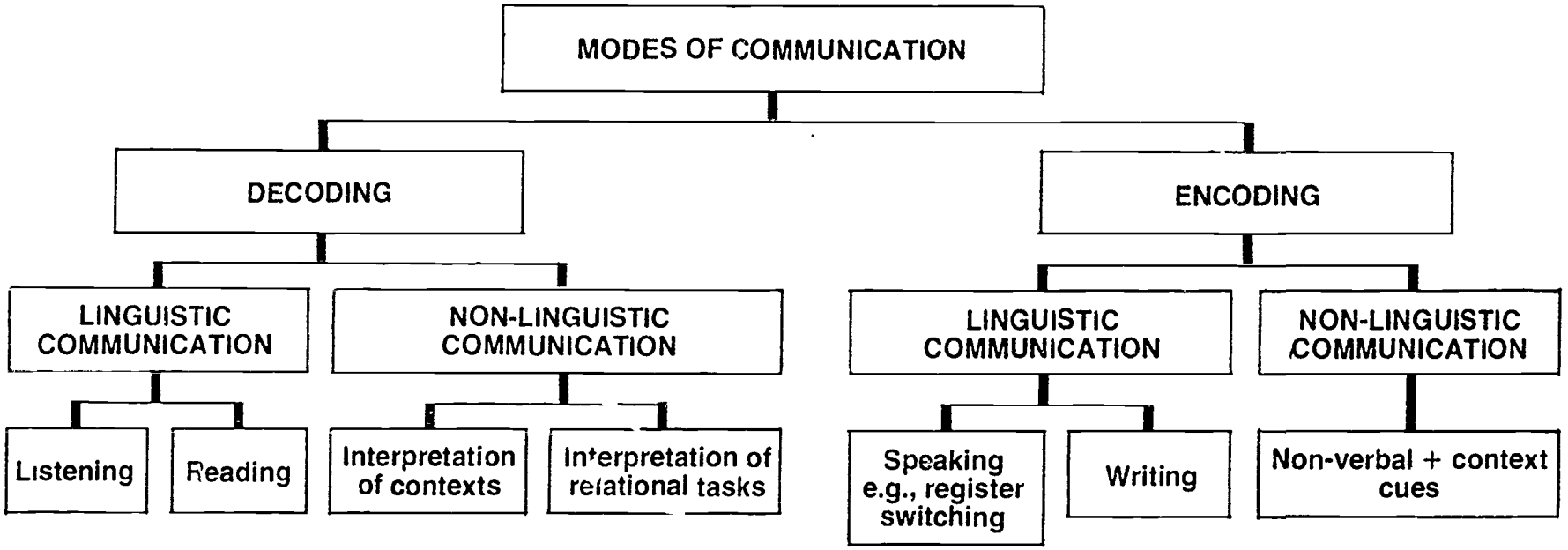
accompanies the ABLE System provides a complete scenario for distance training through TV.

Conclusion

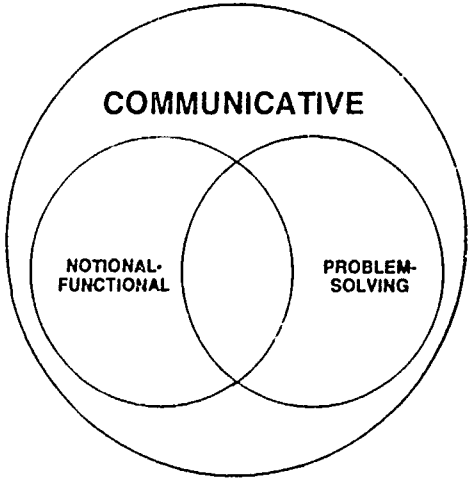
The purpose of ABLE is twofold. Though it is being developed as a set of teaching materials, it is also an ongoing research project. We hope that the data collected by the users of the ABLE System will generate new insights into the interaction of language and culture and new ways of dealing with the problems that occur when languages and cultures are in conflict.

Those who wish to participate in this research may write to CARIBOU Associates at 346 Park Street, Montclair, NJ 07043, USA.

TAXONOMY OF MODES OF COMMUNICATION



MODEL OF LANGUAGE CONTEXTS



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